U.S. Aquaculture and The National Offshore Aquaculture Act of 2005

Is Aquaculture Important?

Yes, demand for seafood is on the rise in the United States and abroad. Recent federal health guidelines call for Americans to double their seafood consumption. With capture fisheries stable or static, the increase in seafood supply will most likely come from aquaculture, imported or domestic. Currently, over 70% of the seafood that Americans consume is imported, and at least 40% is farmed seafood, grown primarily in Asia and South America. Domestic aquaculture can be an effective option to reduce dependence on seafood imports, provide jobs for economically depressed coastal communities, and increase regional food supply and security. There is also a continuing need to replenish and restore wild populations of marine shellfish and finfish in the United States through hatchery programs. Also called marine stock enhancement, this aspect of aquaculture is critically important to commercial and sport fishing and to endangered species and habitat restoration.

Aquaculture Technology Benefits the U.S. Economy

In the United States, freshwater aquaculture production, such as catfish, far outpaces marine aquaculture. And, despite all the attention on farmed fish, domestic marine production is dominated by shellfish aquaculture, including clams and oysters. In terms of benefits to the economy, the impact of NOAA-developed aquaculture technology amounts to at least $100 million annually and supports thousands of jobs in the United States. Innovation in offshore aquaculture here and abroad will advance technology and provide coastal communities with another method to produce seafood as a complement to wild capture fisheries. With aquaculture projected to provide more of the world's seafood supply, the United States also has an opportunity to lead by example and encourage producers in other countries to adopt best management practices developed here.

Rope cultured mussels grown in the Gulf of Maine

Need for Regulatory Framework Highlighted

Issued in December 2004, the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* acknowledges the growing significance of domestic marine aquaculture for seafood production, and the need for a federal regulatory framework for marine aquaculture. The *Ocean Action Plan* addresses the recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy which, in its September 2004 report to Congress, calls on NOAA to develop a comprehensive, environmentally sound permitting and regulatory program for marine aquaculture. High-level attention to the issue is important since there is no clear mechanism for the permitting of marine aquaculture in federal waters. This regulatory uncertainty is widely acknowledged as the major barrier to the development of offshore aquaculture in the United States. To solve the problem, the Administration requested that NOAA develop legislation to establish a regulatory structure for offshore aquaculture in the United States. The legislation, *The National Offshore Aquaculture Act of 2005*, will facilitate marine aquaculture in federal waters where there is significant potential for development of the domestic aquaculture industry to meet the growing global demand for seafood. *The National Offshore Aquaculture Act* will call for environmental and other safeguards, including environmental requirements, monitoring and enforcement. Issue-specific concerns about offshore aquaculture will be addressed in the regulatory design process once Congress enacts the proposed legislation. The regulatory design process will include a strong role for states, fishery management councils, industry, conservation organizations and other interested stakeholders.

Can Offshore Aquaculture Work?

Yes, there are open ocean pilot projects for shellfish and finfish aquaculture in the United States right now, which are showing good production and environmental results. The projects, located in state waters in New Hampshire, Hawaii and Puerto Rico, demonstrate that the potential effects of open ocean facilities are minimized by proper siting.